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Norway

Time of trial

The trial of the Norwegian ex-diplomat Mr Arne Treholt on charges of espionage, which began on February 25th in Oslo, is expected to last for at least a month. There has been speculation about the likely effects on Norway's September election, for the alleged spy has a strongly political profile. The Labour party—in opposition since 1981—has obvious reasons for concern. Its deputy leader, Mr Einar Foerde, who heads the party's left wing, had long been a close friend of the accused man.

After arresting Mr Treholt in January, 1984, the Norwegian authorities expelled

five Soviet diplomats and trade officials, and released photographs of Mr Treholt meeting a KGB general in Vienna and an Iraqi intelligence agent in Athens. According to the prosecutor in the trial, Mr Treholt admitted soon after his arrest that he had given the Russians information over a period of nine years because they had blackmailed him with photographs taken at a Moscow "orgy"; and that from 1981 onwards he also passed secrets to the Iraqis, who paid large sums into his bank account in Switzerland.

In court, however, Mr Treholt has withdrawn these admissions, claiming that he was in a state of shock when he made them, that he never told the Russians anything that could endanger his country's interests, and that the documents he gave them contained no secret information: "the contents of several of them have been published in *The Economist*". He also said that he had got in touch with the Iraqis through his Greek Socialist friends, who had strongly influenced his views. His wife has published letters he wrote from prison in which he claimed that he was merely an "unorthodox diplomat", and that from the Russians he got as much as he gave.

Mr Treholt's father was a minister in several of the post-1945 Labour governments that made Norway a founder-member of Nato and earned it a reputation for

steadiness among its allies. The son (who is now 42) soon became, and has remained, one of the party's active left-wingers. This did not impede his career. When Labour was in power in the 1970s he served for several years as chief assistant to the minister for sea law questions, Mr Jens Evensen (whose concessions to Russia over fishing rights have been attributed by many Norwegians to Mr Treholt's influence), and then joined Norway's team at the United Nations.

Although he was probably already under suspicion, Mr Treholt was allowed, on his return from New York in 1982, to take a senior course at Norway's defence college—where, according to the prosecution, he got much of the military information that he passed to the KGB; and in late 1983 he was given a plum job as head of the foreign ministry's press department a few weeks before his arrest.

The arrest damaged the Labour party's standing in the opinion polls last year. But Labour largely recovered when it moderated its attacks on the pro-Nato policies of the present centre-right coalition. This moderation reflected the newly subdued mood among left-wingers that developed after Mr Treholt's arrest. Some Norwegians think that the Treholt factor may, after all, have improved Labour's election prospects—especially if the moderates can prevail at next month's

party congress. Moreover, the trial may embarrass the government by raising more questions about the promotion, and the admission to the defence college, of a man who was already suspected of being a spy.